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AUTHOR Piper, Paul S.
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ABSTRACT

This document describes the successful schools-within-a-school (SWS) program implemented at Kapa'a Elementary School in Hawaii. The SWS model addresses the issue of school size and its ramifications. In 1989, the school sought the help of a leading educational researcher, Dr. Mary Anne Raywid, to develop a change model that gave the teachers license to form collaborative teams based on their strengths and approaches to education. SWS allows teachers and students to create a discrete identification within the larger social structure of the school. The first school to originate within Kapa'a Elementary was Ke Kula Kaiapuni Hawaii O Kapa'a, the Hawaiian immersion school which began in 1989. SMILE, a school using a whole language approach to education came into being in 1991. EXPLORE School, founded at the same time as SMILE, encourages a hands-on inquiry approach to education. Other schools such as ENTERPRISE, COSMIC, and KALEIDOSCOPE focus on applied technology, critical thinking skills, and math-oriented curriculum respectively. The document describes necessary elements for making the SWS model work, the various schools within Kapa'a, and other SWS models. Kapa'a encountered several implementation problems, such as teacher resistance, "school hopping," difficulty in coordinating schedules, and a devastating hurricane. Problems were resolved by developing teacher-administrator liaisons, requiring a 1-year commitment from students and their parents, and providing teacher stipends for 10 paid planning days. The Kapa'a Elementary SWS program emerged from a grassroots movement by parents, teachers, and administrators to address problems manifested by the school's enormous size and student population. The model reflects one way of engaging all relevant parties in a child's education. (LMI)

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Schools-Within-a-School: The Kapa'a Elementary School Model

by Paul S. Piper, Program Specialist

Introduction

Imagine a school where teachers naturally join together to form teams or communities based on their philosophies, strengths, and passions; where children are given the choice of traditional, experimental, and/or subject-oriented learning options; where parents are given the choice of "schools" for their children. Then imagine that all this is located in the same building or on the same campus; a school where "choice" is the essential ingredient. What you have visualized is a school-within-a-school (SWS) program, similar to the one now existing at Kapa'a Elementary School on the island of Kauai, Hawaii.

Also called "house-plans," "learning communities," "pods," "rivers," and a variety of other terms, these innovative programs draw from the educational philosophies of Theodore Sizer, John Goodlad, and other progressive educators. The philosophies have at their core the same basic goals:

- Divide a large, impersonal, often threatening (particularly to children in the lower elementary grades) school environment into comfortable, sympathetic groupings.
- Create these divisions in an organic fashion that emerges from the teaching philosophies of the teachers within each grouping. (This gives teachers and students "ownership" and empowerment over the curriculum and allows them to experiment, discover, and grow in and through their work.)
- Allow for non-traditional grouping practices, cooperative and collaborative learning, and flexible curricula.
- Allow both students and parents to choose the manner of education they feel best reflects and reinforces their values.
- Provide students with a personalized, coherent education based on a particular philosophy and vision, as opposed to the fractured education children often get in public schools (e.g., Whole Language one year, traditional approach the next, math-oriented the next, and so on).

It is also noteworthy that the American Federation of Teachers proposed in 1988 that SWS become a cornerstone of school restructuring (Reecer, 1988).

One of the primary researchers in the field of alternative education, Dr. Mary Anne Raywid, who was instrumental in developing the Kapa'a School model, defines SWS as "an administrative unit created within a larger school...separate and distinct by having its own teachers, its own courses, space, and distinctive environment" (Raywid, 1985).

The SWS concept emerged on the continental U.S. from research on ideal school size, and the attempt to make large schools small. Kapa'a, as one of the largest Hawaii schools, became a perfect candidate for SWS. The hope was to foster a closer relationship between students and teachers that would allow for a focus on psychological as well as academic development (Burke, 1987).

Some of the SWS research came out of at-risk studies that identified factors — such as overcrowding and factory-like, impersonal, and unfocused school environments — that set students up for failure.

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While many SWS experiments thus far have involved intermediate or high school environments, there is no reason that this concept cannot have vastly wider and deeper applications.

For example, there is no reason the model has to be limited to extremely large schools. It could be modified to work with schools having as few as 500 students. Perhaps less. And there is certainly no reason it has to be limited to intermediate or high schools, as Kapa'a Elementary School's program demonstrates. One study indicates that students in small elementary schools perceived a closer, warmer relationship with their teachers, fellow students, and other adults, as well as a stronger connection with the school (Moracco, 1978). The success of Kapa'a Elementary's SWS program is a good example of what future models of this program can, and probably will, look like.

Steps toward Implementation at Kapa'a Elementary School

Kapa'a Elementary School was opened in 1883 on Kauai, Hawaii. At that time it was an intimate rural school largely serving the children of Portuguese laborers who worked on local sugar plantations. As all things change, so did Kapa'a School and its environs. A large pineapple plantation closed in 1962, which opened up vast areas of land in the Kapa'a area for development. The scenic plateau overlooking Kapa'a and the rugged coastline became the site of extensive housing developments, many of them for low income families.

The Kawaihau school district itself is extensive, comprising a diverse cross-cultural mix of students from neighborhoods as far away as Wailua and Anahola, a distance of ten miles. Within the last ten years the population of Kapa'a itself has doubled, pushing the student population to 1,397 students, making it the second largest K-6 school in the state. The elementary school shares a campus with an intermediate and high school, so that every day more than 2,300 students arrive in cars or buses, or on foot, at the same site. These 2,300 students share the same cafeteria and the same library. The impact of this can be overwhelming.

Says Clifton Bailey, principal of Kapa'a Elementary, "Put yourself in the heart and mind of a kindergarten child arriving on campus for the first time. It doesn't take a lot of imagination to see that the experience could be frightening."

Many studies have been done on large school environments, and the results are all remarkably similar:

- Lack of communication, and poor translation of communication into action, is a major problem that provides a breeding ground for discipline and academic problems. Schoolwide activities, such as assemblies, become virtually impossible, while full staff meetings are cumbersome to the point of ineffectiveness.
- Staff members often develop behavioral characteristics typical of a large, impersonal, dehumanized environment — not out of a lack of compassion, but for survival.
- The vastness, and seeming chaos, of the environment strips administrators, teachers, staff, students, and parents of individual significance, often leading to a feeling of hopelessness within a factory-like environment.

To address the issue of size and its ramifications, early in 1989 Kapa'a Elementary parents and staff began looking at research on innovative educational programs that might adequately address some of these issues. During these extensive and often exhausting brainstorming and sharing sessions, the parents encountered the work of Dr. Mary Anne Raywid, one of the leading researchers in educational reform and an advocate of the SWS model. At the time, Dr. Raywid was a visiting professor at the University of Hawaii at Manoa, and was invited to Kapa'a by the PTSA (Parent Teacher Students Association).

During a succession of visits and workshops, Dr. Raywid detailed a model for change that gave the teachers license and support to form collaborative teams based on their distinctive approaches to education. This model, the basis for schools-within-a-school, requires a commitment on the part of a school which Dr. Raywid, school administrators, teachers, and parents charted and discussed.

The plan requires that the teachers responsible for the various groupings or schools need to determine: the learning approach they will use; the design or modification of the curriculum; the assessment and evaluation tools and how to correlate them with the curriculum and learning approach; the school climate they want to create; the way roles will be assigned to teachers, parents, principal, students; the way decisions will be made; the methods of collaboration and parent involvement; the relationship of the school to society; the traits, values, and attributes desired in students; the necessary organizational features (structure, governance, communication channels); and the relationship of the mini-schools to the entire school.

In addition to these requirements, Dr. Raywid detailed several other elements she felt were important to make the program work:

- Strong stable leadership. The principal must be committed to seeing the program through. A timeline of at least three years was cited.
- Voluntary participation on the part of the teachers.

Teachers must not be forced into groupings. Those teachers hesitant to adapt to the model should be taught by example, not pushed.

- Curriculum, assessment, and teaching approaches should all be research-based. Research is the key to any profession.
- Training and planning time must be made available to teachers, and others involved in the process. Planning should be ongoing and continuous.
- The budget must remain flexible for rapid adaptations and/or growth spurts.
- Grouping of children should not be linked to their ability, but rather to a learning approach or learner's interest.
- Collaboration should be ongoing and continuous.
- Follow-up support needs to be made available.
- Advisory groups are recommended. Each child should have an adult who is a special advocate, and who can give sustained, undivided attention to that child on a scheduled basis.

About the same time these planning and discussion sessions were going on, the school attracted the attention of State of Hawaii Senators Bert Kobayashi and Mike McCartney. They both visited the school in late 1989 to hear about the concerns of parents and the administration. Senator Kobayashi lent his support to the project, originally proposing a variant of the schools-within-a-school plan which called for three separate schools under three separate administrations. This plan was soon rejected as one that would create more bureaucracy and confusion rather than alleviate it.

Talks and meetings continued through 1990, and resulted in the crystallization of a school design. Also during this time, several parents who strongly supported the plan traveled to Honolulu to testify before the legislature and request funding to get the program started. By telling Kapa'a's story, they so moved the members of the legislature, that they received enough monetary support for their program to almost double the school's budget.

The SWS program at Kapa'a Elementary School was officially launched in May of 1991, after receiving $175,294 from the legislature. It formally began with the addition of two new schools: **SMILE** (School of Meaningful and Integrated Learning Experiences), a language arts-oriented school, and **EXPLORE**, an inquiry-based science school. **SMILE** was available to children K-2, while **EXPLORE** was open to grades 1-4. The Hawaiian Immersion school, **Ke Kula Kaiapuni Hawaii O Kapa'a**, had previously opened in the fall of 1989 to students entering grades K-2, before the school had officially endorsed SWS.

KALEIDOSCOPE, a math-based, developmentally-appropriate school opened in the fall of 1992, along with **ENTERPRISE** School, which focused on using technology for collaborative learning, and **COSMIC** School, which is based on the principles of Talents Unlimited, a program of creative and critical thinking skills instruction.

The Schools Within

One of the qualities that the SWS programs strive for is allowing teachers and children to create a discrete identity within the larger social structure of the entire school. Since the individual schools at Kapa'a occupy different sections of the campus, often in their own building or section of a building, the children are given the chance to grow together in an intimate environment. These smaller groupings help foster close friendships and more personal student-teacher and parent-teacher relationships. Teachers get to know most of the children in their school by name, and often comment on the feeling of *o'hana* or sense of family this gives the school. Designs, logos, and mottoes also lend a feeling of identity and unity to the school. One teacher noted that " parents seem more interested in knowing me as a person."

The first school to originate within Kapa'a Elementary was **Ke Kula Kaiapuni Hawaii O Kapa'a**, the Hawaiian immersion school, which began in 1989. **Ke Kula Kaiapuni** has grown in size to a school of four teachers and an aide who teach a total of 54 children in grades K-4. Each classroom combines two grades. These children are taught exclusively in Hawaiian, and are expected to carry on all discourse in Hawaiian. Textbooks, and even computer programs such as *Kidpix*, have been translated into Hawaiian. The school incorporates Hawaiian myths, folktales, and music into the curriculum, as well as Hawaiian systems of math and science.

SMILE was one of the next two schools to be created, and came into being in 1991. It is currently home to 179 students and eight teachers, and spans grades K-3. Based on the research and work of language arts specialist/storyteller/musician Nellie Edge, **SMILE** is using a whole language approach to education that incorporates extensive use of rhyme, rhythm, repetition, and song. The school is child-centered, literature-oriented, and has a strong literacy base. Emotional and physical involvement in learning is emphasized, as is a relaxed and joyful social climate. **SMILE** has been the recipient of several grants for innovative parent-student reading and literacy programs.

EXPLORE School was founded at the same time as **SMILE** but its

orientation is quite different. **EXPLORE** encourages a hands-on inquiry approach to education. The focus is scientific, and is grounded in predictions based on observations of the natural world. There is a great deal of parent and community involvement with this school, and the children and teachers publish a quarterly parent newsletter. **EXPLORE** is currently K-6, with 168 students taught by seven teachers.

ENTERPRISE School is a school of applied technology. Some 219 children in grades 4-6 are taking advantage of this school, which teaches students to use computers (8 per classroom), video, and other technologies in projects requiring creative thinking, problem solving, and cooperative learning. There are six teachers at this school, which is the recipient of a large Chapter 2 grant.

COSMIC School is based on the principles of Talents Unlimited, a program of instruction in creative and critical thinking skills. Scientific themes are used to teach the art of reasoning and critical thinking to 103 children in grades 4-6. The school relies heavily on cooperative learning and teaming, both of students and teachers. Problem solving and cooperative skills are also strongly emphasized. The school involves the community in planning and decision making.

KALEIDOSCOPE CONNECTION encourages 127 children in grades K-3 to celebrate individual differences and potential. The school's emphasis is on a developmentally-appropriate, hands-on, math-oriented curriculum, designed to use children's natural approach to learning. Children are encouraged to become risk-takers. **KALEIDOSCOPE** has eight teachers.

EXCEL School is the largest of the schools, housing 333 children in grades K-6, with 14 teachers. **EXCEL** School teaches what might be called "basic skills" and uses a traditional, textbook-based curriculum. It is teacher-directed and skill-based. The school uses parent involvement and support to help instill traditional values.

There are five teachers who have not joined any of the schools, preferring to remain independent. These classroom teachers currently serve students who have no school preference.

The organization of the schools calls for a teacher representative who is responsible for representing the teachers to the administration. However, principal Clifton Bailey says, "I find it is often more effective to meet with the teachers of a school as a group, rather than work through the representative." While communicating with the representative may work for some things, group meetings are often preferable.

Although these schools function as discrete units, there is interschool collaboration for events such as the May Day celebration, Christmas program, Spring Fair, and Open House, during which teachers articulate and demonstrate their respective schools to interested parents.

Schools-Within-a-School: Other Models

The SWS program evolved out of experiments with alternative schools in the 1960s. While there have been notable experiments with SWS, particularly in the intermediate and high schools of California, Oregon (particularly with respect to vocational education programs), and Pennsylvania, the most extensive use of this restructuring concept has been in New York (Archer, 1989).

In District Four of New York City there are currently at least 56 schools within 20 school buildings. These schools span the spectrum of educational approaches and directions: progressive (alternative) schools, traditional schools, science and/or math- oriented schools, language arts-oriented schools, a maritime school, performing arts schools, a sports-oriented school, and a career-oriented school, among others. The advantages of this array of schools, according to Seymour Fliegel, the deputy director of District Four, are extremely logical: "In most schools you have 16 different philosophical viewpoints in one school. With choice, a teacher who believes in open education can work with colleagues who also believe in it, while a teacher who prefers the prep school approach can do what he or she believes in" (Brandt, 1991).

A strong advocate of choice, Fliegel claims that SWS is the perfect method of giving average and non-wealthy people some of the same choices that wealthier, private school parents and students have. And the advantage to housing the schools on one campus, or in one building, is that a family does not need to get involved in complicated transportation issues just because parents want their children to experience a certain type of education.

In Hawaii, there are two SWS programs other than the Kapa'a Elementary program, and although neither is nearly as ambitious, they are noteworthy. A program similar to SWS began at Castle High School in 1989, emerging out of Department of Education and University of Hawaii studies on "at-risk" prevention, and funded by a Chapter 2 grant. Called the **School Success Program**, teams of teachers were established to teach ninth graders core subjects. The program differed from many SWS programs in that it initially excluded Gifted and Talented and Special Education students. It also did not allow for choice, as students were randomly assigned to teams. The program was expanded to the tenth grade in 1990, and continued to

grow until 1993, when a termination of external funds reduced it to just one ninth grade team.

Waiau Elementary currently has a SWS program incorporating three schools: **Kula Kaiapuni** (a K-7 Hawaiian immersion school), **Wings** (a whole language/constructivism oriented school, featuring cross-age grouping and thematic units), and **Apex** (a traditional basal-oriented school). The beauty of the Waiau program is that it arose organically out of teacher research and philosophy, and is not size related. Waiau Elementary is a medium size school with a student population of about 620.

In addition to Castle and Waiau, Kipapa Elementary School has an intensive performing arts program which is essentially a school within the larger school. Several Hawaii high schools have "academy" programs, which are basically vocationally-oriented schools within the larger school structure. These schools, such as the Medical Academy at Farrington High School in Honolulu, Finance Academy at McKinley High School in Honolulu, and Building and Construction Technology Academy at Kailua High School in the Windward District, often collaborate with local businesses and/or community agencies.

SWS and Choice

The school choice movement, charter schools, and magnet schools reflect some of the same dissatisfactions that SWS directly confronts within the public school system. By allowing teachers the choice to group with like-minded teachers and develop curricula consistent with their philosophies, and by allowing parents and children to choose which teacher group and curriculum they want, and by housing these multiple "schools" within the same structure or campus, SWS goes a long way toward making school choice a more accessible option. While choice *per se* does not seem to have been the initial intention of early experiments with SWS, it is clearly one outcome of SWS.

How Well Is SWS at Kapa'a Elementary School Working?

Principal Clifton Bailey thinks Kapa'a's SWS program is terrific, and it seems most of the teachers, children, and parents agree. The Spring 1994 parent surveys seem extremely positive, and Joan Shaw, a staff facilitator, comments, "I think the parents are seeing the teachers as partners in learning, instead of just part of this enormous faculty, and kind of anonymous."

Kapa'a Elementary School did experience resistance from some teachers. This is to be expected by any school attempting to undergo systemic change, and the best solution is to plan for a protracted, cautious evolution involving all parties. Even then, some decisions will not please everyone.

Facing pressure from parents who sought immediate change, and an administration that felt it was in a near-crisis situation, Kapa'a Elementary School opted to act quickly. Although there were extensive (and intense) meetings, mini-conferences, and training sessions, sponsored by parent groups (such as the PTSA), teachers, and administration, and although many teachers provided enormous initiative, certain teachers felt that they were being forced into the program. "It definitely disrupted some peer and collegial relationships," says Clifton Bailey.

Kapa'a attempted to ease the situation with the addition of two staff facilitators who act as a liaison between the administration and faculty. Lindsay Kamm, facilitator, stated that the situation continues to improve, and that communication is a key ingredient. One researcher cites lack of communication between schools and the main administration as a major problem with SWS (Niehaus, 1971).

Another major obstacle to Kapa'a's attempt at a smooth transition was the devastating Hurricane Iniki in September 1992. "There is perhaps nothing teachers hate as much as moving their classroom," Cliff Bailey commented, "and not only did we ask them to move so they could form separate schools, but then Iniki forced us off the campus for five months."

Yet another problem Kapa'a has experienced might be dubbed "school hopping." This occurs when parents have their children try out one school for a while, then another, then another. This can lead to logistical headaches. Kapa'a asks indecisive parents to fully research their choices, including talking with teachers, before they make a decision. The previously mentioned Open House provides one opportunity to do this.

Once a decision is made, the school asks for a year's commitment. If problems arise, a solution is first attempted within the school. If it becomes clear that the conflict is linked to the school philosophy, then the student is allowed to transfer to another school.

Providing teachers with paid planning time has been another important element of a smooth operation. Kapa'a has done well along these lines, but it is a cost for which schools considering a SWS program need to plan. Kapa'a provides stipends for 10 paid planning days, usually held after school or on weekends to avoid the use of substitute teachers. The time is used for group planning and curriculum development, and may involve students, parents, and administration.

Difficulty in meshing schedules with the district office has also been problematic, since district offices tend to organize and plan their

schedules by grade level. Grade levels are no longer the primary organization at a SWS.

Other potential problems to be aware of in planning for SWS (although these have not been problems at Kapa'a) are: increased inter-group scrutiny, jealousy, favoritism, tension, and competition for resources (Farber and Ascher, 1991).

Conclusion

In the words of Clifton Bailey, "Kid's don't want to be entertained, they want to be engaged. They want to ask questions and find answers. They come to school curious, but school grinds that desire out of them." It is important to remember, when talking about SWS or any other educational technique, program, or practice, that it is a means to an end. That "engaging" children in their education is the key issue. And if a school is serious about engaging all students, including low-income and at-risk children, they cannot utilize models that necessarily cause some children to fail. To engage students, it is necessary as well to engage teachers, administrators, parents, and even community members in education. Education doesn't work in a vacuum.

The Kapa'a Elementary SWS program emerged from a grassroots movement by parents, teachers, and administration to address problems manifested by the school's enormous size and student population, and the deleterious effects of this size on the students' education. The SWS model that emerged was based on research done not solely by administration or teachers, but also by concerned parents and community members. The model reflects one way of engaging all relevant parties in a child's education.

By offering a choice of "schools" within one physical school, teachers are given the opportunity to form teams and create curricula that emerges out of their own philosophies and passions. The parents are given the choice of schools for their children. The community is engaged in education at an integral level through curriculum projects that encourage community involvement. And students, all students, have the choice of a school that will offer them the motivation to become truly engaged in their own learning.

For more information about Kapa'a Elementary School's SWS plan, call Principal Clifton Bailey at (808) 822-4141, or contact the PREL Laboratory Network Program at (808) 533-6000.

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